

India set to acquire Ambedkar's home in London

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London: India is set to acquire a prime property here for an estimated 4 million pounds where B R Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian Constitution and dalit rights activist, lived during his student days in the 1920s.

An "under offer" sign outside the 10 King Henry's Road townhouse on a leafy street in Chalk Farm area of north London indicates that the sale process is nearly complete.

A blue plaque commemorates the fact that Ambedkar lived there in 1921-22 when he was studying at London School of Economics (LSE).

"It is work in progress," confirmed a senior Indian High Commission diplomat here, who has been facilitating the process since the Maharashtra government took the decision to acquire the property.

"This is a historical moment for us because it is not just a house but has the emotions of all Indians attached to it," Rajkumar Badole, Maharashtra's minister of social justice and special assistance, had said during a visit to London in April.

The minister, who led a three-member delegation from his ministry including state minister Dilip Kamble and principal secretary Ujjwal Uke, had also initiated talks on establishing a Dr Ambedkar Chair at LSE which would be linked with two new scholarships for Indian students.

The cost of the London property, likely to be borne by the Maharashtra government, is estimated between 3.2 million pounds and 4 million pounds.

The building, which already has a memorial plaque dedicated to "Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, Indian Crusader for Social Justice", will require some essential repair work after which the Maharashtra government plans to open it to the public.

Among some of the other proposals under consideration are to use one of the floors as a transitory residence for Indian students who arrive in the UK to study.

The London-based Federation of Ambedkarites and Buddhist Organisation (FABO) UK, which had triggered the whole process by writing to the Indian government to purchase the property as a historically relevant monument, feels it will become a "focal point to spread Dr Ambedkar's message about equality, human rights and social justice".

The 2,050 sq feet three-storey house is in one of London's prime locations went up for sale through an estate agent last year. The decision for Maharashtra to purchase the home was cleared by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and the state Cabinet gave its final nod to the proposal in February this year.

An independent survey of the six-bedroom house must now be conducted before a sale can be finalised. Ambedkar, who died in 1956 aged 65 was posthumously conferred with the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian award, in 1990.